

Testimony in Support of H.B. 47 – The Human Trafficking Prevention Act
Submitted by: Tami Brown Rodriguez
Director of Policy, Jaco Booyens Ministries
Family Member of a Survivor

Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this written testimony in support of H.B. 47, the Human Trafficking Prevention Act. My name is [Your Name], and I serve as the Director of Policy for Jaco Booyens Ministries, a national nonprofit dedicated to ending child exploitation and human trafficking through prevention, education, and policy reform. But today, I am also writing to you as a family member of a survivor.

My niece was trafficked for 15 years. Her story began like so many others — not on a street corner, but in a place of trust. It started in a home where abuse was present and was then compounded by the failure of systems and institutions that were supposed to protect her. She was groomed by someone she should have been able to trust, and instead of being rescued early, her suffering continued for over a decade.

This is why H.B. 47 matters. This bill recognizes the horrific realities that survivors face and strengthens Ohio's laws to reflect the seriousness of crimes like kidnapping, abduction, and trafficking — especially when they involve children.

Key provisions of the bill that we strongly support include:

- Raising the age threshold from 13 to 18 for certain kidnapping charges, recognizing that all minors are vulnerable to coercion and exploitation;
- Increasing mandatory sentencing for both kidnapping and trafficking, ensuring those who target minors or individuals with disabilities face serious, life-altering consequences;
- Changing the mental state requirement in trafficking from "knowingly" to "recklessly", which closes a major loophole that has allowed many traffickers to avoid justice;
- And, importantly, defining and penalizing sexual motivation and involuntary servitude in cases of abduction, which better reflects the tactics traffickers use to control their victims.

Ohio has made great strides in addressing trafficking, but perpetrators still know how to work around the law. This bill addresses those gaps. It gives prosecutors better tools. It gives families a fighting chance. And it sends a strong message that Ohio will not tolerate the exploitation of its most vulnerable.

I urge this committee to pass H.B. 47 and move it swiftly through the legislative process. Survivors like my niece — and the families who love them — deserve to know that justice is possible.

Thank you for your time, and for your commitment to protecting the innocent.

Sincerely,
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